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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EZ](#)  
SUBJECT: CZECH POLITICS: STRUGGLING CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS  
PICK OUTSIDER FOR NEW LEADER

REF: PRAGUE 1333

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Mike Dodman for reasons 1.4  
b+d

1.(U) SUMMARY. Jiri Cunek, until a few months ago, a relatively obscure figure in Czech politics, was chosen to be the new Chairman of the Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) December 9 during an extraordinary party congress. Cunek beat long-time party stalwart and former Justice Minister Vlasta Parkanova 182 to 82. The party, which has been suffering a serious decline in the polls, as well as an identity crisis (REFTEL), also picked several new Deputy Chairs who had been put forward by Cunek. It is still too early to say whether Cunek and his team will reverse or exacerbate the party's decline, or what impact the new leadership will have on the efforts to form a coalition government that can pass a vote of confidence. END SUMMARY

12. (C) Poloff met with Petr Rybar, the General Secretary of the Christian Democrats on October 18. Rybar admitted he didn't know who was going to run for the party leadership at the December 9 Congress. He mentioned several possibilities, but didn't include Cunek as a potential candidate. On October 28 Cunek was elected to the Senate with the biggest margin of any candidate. When poloff met with Rybar again on December 1, Rybar predicted that Cunek would win the Chairmanship by a 60-40 margin over Parkanova. Cunek actually won 182 of the 300 votes - exactly 60%. Parkanova split the remaining 40% with two other candidates. Cunek also succeeded in sidelining long-time party leaders such as Jan Kasal, Deputy Chairman of Parliament's lower house, and in elevating regional leaders such as Roman Linek, the Deputy Governor of the Pardubice Region and Stanislav Juranek, the Governor of South Moravia. The sudden rise in Cunek's fortunes is attributed to the publicity he received after forcibly removing Roma rent defaulters from his town. While some party leaders, such as Kasal, criticized the relocation as a simple, populist, and insensitive solution to a complex problem, many members of the general public came to see Cunek as a man capable of action. The public debate generated widespread publicity for Cunek, at the time a little known Mayor of Vsetin, and helped him onto the national stage. It was during this acrimonious public debate that Cunek had the first of several unpublicized meetings with Jiri Paroubek, Chairman of the left-of-center Social Democrats (CSSD). Cunek and Paroubek have since established a close working relationship, which could have an impact on the ongoing attempt to form a coalition government.

13. (C) Rybar believes that the party's troubles were linked to mistakes made by the previous party Chairman, Miroslav Kalousek. Rybar identified two specific "strategic mistakes." He said the party moved too far to the right and got too close to ODS, and the party's anti-Communist position

was too strong. Cunek has apologized for steps taken by Kalousek in February 2004 when Kalousek pulled the party out of a coalition with CSSD and called for the resignation of then Prime Minister Stanislav Gross (CSSD). Cunek has also called for a debate on the party's unyielding stance towards the Communists. Cunek's positions, as well as his nascent relationship with Paroubek, could strengthen Paroubek's hand in the ongoing talks between ODS and CSSD over a possible coalition government.

14. (C) COMMENT. Rybar told poloff that if an ODS/CSSD/KDU-CSL coalition succeeds, KDU-CSL would like to have two ministries, ven if they are small ones such as Culture and Education. Cunek himself might want a cabinet seat The Governor of South Moravi Stanislav Juranek, who supports Cunek and was elected one of the five Deputy Chairs at the December 9 Congress, has also expressed some interest in a cabinet post. Rybar doesn't see Kalousek accepting either the Cultural or Education ministries. Rybar thinks Kalousek could end up with a position as economic czar, or even health minister. Rybar used the argument that former CSSD Health Minister David Rath (CSSD) and current ODS Health Minister Tomas Julinek (ODS) hate each other so muh (even beyond the grave was the expression Ryba used) that no compromise ispossible there. Kalousek could offer a third alternative. Rybar acknowledged to poloff on December 1 that the party was floundering. He explained the party's membership continues to decline, guessing that it had fewer than 40,000 members. He described a recent meeting of the Plzen Regional Committee. Of more than 1000 potential delegates, only 11 showed up. None of the four candidates for Party Chair even bothered to go to the meeting. If Cunek is going to lead the party back to its role as a small but influential kingmaker, he and his new team will have to make deals with political rivals, but also define a clear,

consistent identity for the party's followers. Cunek's remarks at the weekend KDU-CSL congress were notable for revealing almost nothing about his views on policy matters (although in a subsequent interview he said he is a supporter of missile defense). His election as party Chairman has revived public discussion of his stance towards the Roma. Some see his election as a sign that KDU-CSL is turning into a more nationalist party. Others say it reflects the difficult position the party finds itself in. It will take more time to determine who Cunek really is and what his victory means for the declining Christian Democrats. END  
COMMENT  
GRABER